



Journal of Entrepreneurship & Business Strategies (JEBS)

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1 (2025)



PUBLISHED BY
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA

Transforming Traditional Pay Systems: Strategies for Employee Acceptance Amid Human, Social, and Economic Resistance Factors in South Sudan

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Article Information

Received: May 20, 2025

Accepted: June 23, 2025

Published: June 30, 2025

Keywords

Acceptance, Economic, Employee, Pay, Strategies, Systems, Traditional

ABSTRACT

This study investigates employee perceptions of traditional pay systems, readiness for new models, and effective strategies for transitioning to modern compensation structures within South Sudan's construction sector, a context marked by conflict, economic instability, and informality. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach involving questionnaires (59 respondents), interviews (21 participants), and three participatory workshops, the research aimed to assess limitations of existing pay systems, analyze resistance factors, evaluate employee readiness, and propose context-specific transition strategies. Findings consistently revealed that traditional pay systems are perceived as highly limited, particularly concerning recognition of qualifications (28.57%-33%) and overtime compensation (28.57%-32%). A significant majority of employees (65%-87%) expressed readiness and acceptance for new pay models, driven primarily by Perceived Organizational Support (29%-43%), Pay Satisfaction and Appraisal (30%-45%), and Fairness and Justice (22%-40%). Crucially, Technology/System Acceptance consistently showed the lowest impact (5%-10%), indicating that human-centric factors such as trust, transparency, and employee involvement are paramount for successful pay reform. The study concludes that effective transitions require prioritizing a supportive and just organizational environment, clear communication regarding pay components, active employee participation in decision-making, and addressing specific pain points of traditional systems, rather than solely focusing on technological integration.

INTRODUCTION

South Sudan's construction sector operates under profound and multifaceted pressures stemming from a protracted civil conflict, pervasive economic instability, and systemic underdevelopment. Decades of warfare have crippled the nation's infrastructure, resulting in severely poor road networks, widespread insecurity, and a critical shortage of skilled local labor (UNDP, 2021). These interconnected challenges significantly contribute to chronic inefficiencies, escalate the costs of essential infrastructure projects, and foster deep dissatisfaction among construction workers. The lack of adequate infrastructure, compounded by ongoing insecurity and population displacement, has led to rampant unemployment and the proliferation of informal labor practices across the country (UNDP, 2021).

Within this precarious environment, traditional pay systems prevalent in the South Sudanese construction industry have proven largely static, opaque, and ill-equipped to address the sector's unique dynamics. These models often fail to adequately incentivize performance, recognize crucial employee qualifications, or account for the harsh and unpredictable local conditions, such as road inaccessibility, adverse weather, and the scarcity of skilled workforce (ILO, 2021; World Bank, 2020). Such rigid and unstructured compensation approaches notably fall short in providing meaningful motivation or reflecting true market dynamics, thereby intensifying employee dissatisfaction and contributing to broader organizational inefficiencies (AfDB, 2022).

The imperative for reform is further complicated by significant resistance to changes in pay systems, influenced by complex psychological, cultural, and socio-political factors. Employees in contexts like South Sudan often harbor fears of the unknown, exhibit a profound lack of trust in management, and perceive reforms as potential threats to their precarious job security (Oreg *et al.*, 2011). Given the prevalence of informal employment contracts and weak governance structures, skepticism towards reforms is particularly pronounced (UNDP, 2019). This resistance is exacerbated by low financial literacy and limited prior exposure to modern compensation systems (Armenakis *et al.*, 1999).

Conversely, literature suggests that employee readiness for new compensation structures is strongly correlated with factors such as perceived organizational support (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986), a sense of fairness, and opportunities for participation in decision-making. When employees feel their contributions are valued and they comprehend the benefits of proposed changes, acceptance significantly improves (Kotter, 1996). In fragile environments like South Sudan, building trust and ensuring clarity are exceptionally critical for navigating change and mitigating resistance (AfDB, 2022).

This study, focusing on three local construction companies (Payii, Markeric, and Tumu) involved in bridge and road construction in South Sudan, is therefore critically necessary. By adopting a mixed-methods approach to assess the limitations of traditional pay systems, analyze resistance factors, evaluate employee

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perceptions and readiness for new models, and propose context-specific transition strategies, the research aims to identify practical, employee-friendly strategies that can effectively support the shift to modern pay systems while systematically addressing the deeply embedded resistance within this challenging operational landscape.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Objective 1: Assess the Limitations of Traditional Pay Systems

Traditional pay systems in developing economies are often rigid, unstructured, and uninformed by performance metrics (World Bank, 2020). In South Sudan, construction companies struggle with project delays due to road inaccessibility, weather challenges, and an unskilled workforce, yet these conditions are not factored into static pay models (ILO, 2021). Such systems fail to provide motivation or reflect market dynamics, contributing to employee dissatisfaction and organizational inefficiencies (AfDB, 2022).

Objective 2: Analyze Resistance Factors to Pay System Reforms

Resistance to change in pay systems is influenced by psychological, cultural, and socio-political factors. Oreg *et al.* (2011) highlight the fear of the unknown, lack of trust in management, and perceived threats to job security as major sources of resistance. In South Sudan, where employment contracts are often informal and governance structures weak, employee skepticism about reforms is pronounced (UNDP, 2019). Resistance is also intensified by low financial literacy and limited exposure to modern compensation systems (Armenakis *et al.*, 1999).

Objective 3: Evaluate Employee Perceptions and Readiness for New Models

Employee readiness for new compensation structures is tied to factors such as perceived organizational support (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986), fairness, and participation in decision-making. Studies show that when employees believe their input is valued, and they understand the benefits of change, acceptance improves (Kotter, 1996). In fragile contexts like South Sudan, trust and clarity are particularly critical for managing change and reducing resistance (AfDB, 2022).

Objective 4: Propose Context-Specific Strategies for Transition

Successful implementation of new pay models requires tailoring strategies to local conditions. UNDP (2019) and ILO (2021) recommend using participatory approaches and adaptive frameworks that respond to operational realities, such as insecurity and limited access to technology. These strategies include clear communication, incremental implementation, and integration of traditional values with modern HR practices (World Bank, 2020).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Approach

This research adopted a mixed-methods approach combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques to ensure triangulation and enrich findings. Data was collected via questionnaires, interviews, and three participatory workshops. The mixed-method design enabled the researcher to validate insights and generate actionable recommendations (Creswell, 2014).

Study Population and Sample Size

The study focused on three local construction companies involved in bridge and road construction: Payii, Markeric, and Tumu. Payii had 28 junior staff and 7 management staff (35 total), Tumu had 14 junior and 3 management staff (17 total), and Markeric had 14 junior and 3 management staff (17 total). The questionnaire results informed the design and agenda of interviews and workshops.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Questionnaire Return Rate

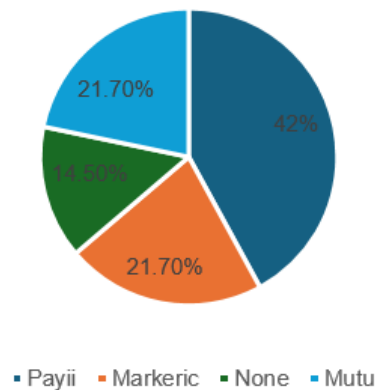


Figure 1: Questionnaire Rate of Return

Payii: 29 respondents out of targeted 35, Tumu: 15 respondents out of targeted 17, Markeric: 15 respondents out of targeted 17. The total respondents who answered the questionnaires were 59 out of the targeted respondents of 69. Therefore, the respondents who didn't answer the questionnaires were 10. As shown in figure 4.1, this implied a large majority of Payii respondents at 42% answered the questionnaires, while 21.7% of Mutu and Markeric respectively, answered the questionnaires. 14.5% of the targeted respondents did not answer the questionnaires

Knowledge of Pay Components

In Figure 2, 29% of employees said they knew the components of their pay while 71% said they did not know components of their pay. The finding indicates that a significant majority (71%) of employees are unaware of the components of their pay, highlighting a critical gap in compensation communication within the firms studied. This lack of understanding among employees regarding how their total compensation is structured (e.g., base

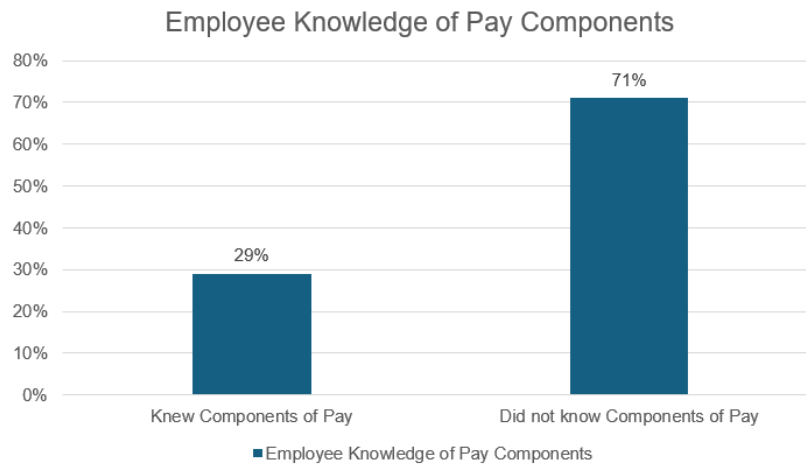


Figure 2: Employee Knowledge of Pay Components

salary, benefits, bonuses, allowances) can lead to decreased job satisfaction, reduced perceptions of pay fairness, and a diminished sense of value from their employer.

Views on the Introduction of a New System

The results the Figure 3 clearly show a strong positive reception to the new pay system. A significant majority of 87 % of employees indicated they accept the new system, highlighting its broad approval. 12 % of employees reported that they don't know, suggesting a need for further clarification or communication for this segment

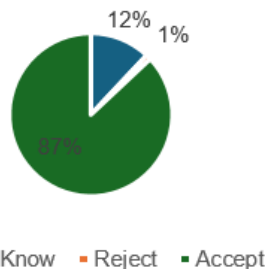


Figure 3: Employees Views on the Introduction of a New Pay System

of the workforce. A very small fraction of 1.0% of employees rejected the new system, indicating minimal opposition. In the overall, the data suggests a highly successful implementation of the new pay system with a large proportion of employees in favor, and only a small segment requiring further engagement.

Questionnaire Results

Limitations of Traditional Pay Systems

Table 1 reveals varying perceptions regarding the limitations of traditional pay systems. “Pay based on qualifications” emerged as the most significant limitation, with 23 respondents (33 %) identifying it as an issue. This suggests a strong feeling that traditional systems often fail to adequately reward individuals based on their skills and expertise. Closely following this, “Monthly salary with overtime” was cited by 22 respondents (32%), indicating concerns about how overtime is compensated within traditional structures. “Performance-based pay” was seen as a limitation by 14 respondents (20 %), suggesting that while it aims to incentivize, its implementation in traditional systems can still be problematic. “Monthly salary with all components” was the least frequently

Table 1: Limitations of Traditional Pay Systems

Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Performance-based pay	23	33
Pay based on qualifications	22	32
Monthly salary with all components	14	20
Monthly salary with overtime	8	12
No response	2	3
Total	69	100

cited limitation among the specified categories, with only 8 respondents (12%) finding it problematic. Finally, 2 respondents (3%) provided no response, highlighting a small segment of indecision or lack of a strong opinion on the presented categories. These results collectively underscore diverse pain points within traditional pay structures, with a particular emphasis on qualifications and overtime compensation.

Employee Readiness for Performance-Based Pay

Table 2 indicates that Perceived Organizational Support is the most influential factor in employee readiness for performance-based pay, representing 43 % of responses among the 69 respondents. This strongly suggests that employees are more receptive to performance-based pay when they feel their organization genuinely values and supports them. Organizational Justice also

Table 2: Employee Readiness for Performance-Based Pay

Factor influencing Readiness	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Perceived Organizational Support	30	43
Organizational Justice	15	22
Expectancy, Instrumentality, Valence	10	15
Participation in Decision-Making	9	13
Readiness for Change	5	7
Total	69	100

plays a significant role, contributing 22 %, highlighting the importance of fair processes and outcomes. Factors related to individual motivation, Expectancy, Instrumentality, and Valence, accounted for 15%, while Participation in Decision-Making contributed 13%, underscoring the benefits of clear linkages between effort and reward, and employee involvement. Lastly, general Readiness for Change had the least impact at 7%. Overall, these findings emphasize that cultivating a supportive and just environment, combined with transparent communication and employee engagement, is crucial for fostering employee readiness for performance-based pay.

Strategies for Employee Acceptance

Table 3 reveals that employee acceptance of new initiatives is primarily driven by human-centric factors,

Table 3: Strategies for Employee Acceptance

Category	Percentage (%)
Fairness and Justice	40
Pay Satisfaction and Appraisal	30
Trust, Risk, Credibility	20
Technology/System Acceptance	10
Total	100

with Fairness and Justice being the most crucial at 40%. This is followed by Pay Satisfaction and Appraisal (30%), highlighting the importance of equitable compensation and effective performance recognition. Trust, Risk, and Credibility also play a significant role (20%), underscoring the need for a trustworthy organizational environment. In contrast, Technology/System Acceptance ranked lowest at 10%, indicating that technological integration alone is insufficient; successful implementation hinges on addressing underlying human and organizational elements like fairness, pay satisfaction, and trust.

Interview Results

Views on Introduction of New Pay New System

Table 4 indicates a predominantly positive outlook. A significant majority of views in the interviews rated at 65 % indicated acceptance of a new pay system. This strong positive reception suggests that there might be existing dissatisfaction with the traditional pay structures, or a perceived benefit from potential changes. Conversely, 22% of the views expressed in the interviews indicated a rejection of the new pay system, representing a segment

of the workforce that either prefers the current system, distrusts the proposed changes, or anticipates negative impacts. A notable 13 % pointed towards “Don’t know,” which could signify a lack of sufficient information about the proposed system, uncertainty about its implications, or a general hesitancy to commit to a view without further details. Overall, while there’s clear majority support, the

Table 4: Views on New Payment System

View on New Pay System	Percentage (%)
Accept	65
Reject	22
Don't know	13

presence of a notable ‘reject’ and ‘don’t know’ segment highlights the need for thorough communication, addressing concerns, and providing clarity to ensure broader buy-in during the implementation of any new pay system.

Limitations of Traditional Pay

As shown in Table 5, the interview results regarding the limitations of traditional pay systems, based on 21 respondents, highlight that “Qualifications” is perceived

Table 5: Limitation of Traditional Pay

Limitation Category	Percentage (%)
Qualifications	29
Performance-based	24
Salary with overtime	24
Salary with all components	19
No response	5

as the most significant limitation, accounting for 29% of responses. This suggests that the current pay structures may not adequately recognize or reward employees based on their skills and educational background. “Performance-based” pay and “Salary with overtime” were equally cited as limitations by 24% of interviewees each, indicating concerns about how performance is measured and compensated, as well as potential issues with overtime payment within traditional systems. “Salary with all components” was seen as a limitation by 19% of respondents, suggesting that even comprehensive salary packages in traditional systems might have shortcomings. A small segment (5%) provided no response. These

findings from the interviews reinforce that, in South Sudan, traditional pay systems face challenges across various dimensions, particularly in how they value qualifications, performance, and overtime.

Readiness for New Pay Model

Table 6 shows the interview results on readiness for a new pay model, based on 21 interviewees, Perceived Organization Support is the most significant factor, accounting for 29% of responses. This highlights that employees are more inclined to accept a new pay model when they feel supported by their organization. Employee Involvement Variable and Organizational Justice were equally impactful, both contributing 24%, suggesting

Table 6: Factor influencing Readiness

Factor influencing Readiness	Percentage (%)
Perceived Organizational Support	29
Organizational Justice	24
Expectancy, Instrumentality, Valence	24
Participation in Decision-Making	14
Readiness for Change	9

that giving employees a voice and ensuring fairness in processes are crucial. Participation in Decision-Making also played a role at 14%, reinforcing the importance of employee input. Finally, general Readiness for Change had the least influence, at 9%. These findings collectively suggest that to successfully introduce a new pay model in South Sudan, organizations should prioritize fostering a supportive environment, ensuring justice, and actively involving employees in the process.

Strategies for Acceptance

As indicated in 7, the interview findings on strategies for employee acceptance reveal that Pay Satisfaction and Appraisal is the most crucial factor, accounting for 40% of responses. This indicates that employees the construction companies in South Sudan are highly likely to accept new initiatives or changes if they feel adequately compensated and that their performance is fairly evaluated. Fairness and Justice emerged as the second most important strategy at 30%, underscoring the strong desire for equitable treatment and transparent processes within the organization. Trust, Risk, and Credibility accounted for 20% of the responses, highlighting the importance of a reliable and trustworthy environment for fostering acceptance. Conversely, Technology/System Acceptance received the lowest percentage at 10%, suggesting that while technological aspects are present, the human

Table 7: Strategies for Acceptance

Strategy	Percentage (%)
Pay Satisfaction and Appraisal	40%
Fairness and Justice	30%
Trust, Risk, Credibility	20%
Technology/System Acceptance	10%

elements of compensation, fairness, and trust are far more influential in securing employee buy-in for new strategies or systems. These results collectively emphasize that people-centric approaches are key to achieving employee acceptance in this context.

Workshop Results

Views on New System

As displayed in Table 8, the findings from the workshops on employees' views regarding a new system reveal a strong inclination towards acceptance. A substantial majority

Table 8: Views on New Payment System

View on New Pay System	Percentage (%)
Accept	65
Reject	22
Don't know	13

of 70% of participants indicated they would accept the new system. This suggests a potentially high level of receptiveness, possibly driven by perceived benefits or a desire for change from existing methods. Conversely, 20% of the participants expressed that they would reject the new system. This segment represents a notable group that might have concerns, objections, or prefer the status quo. The remaining 10% of respondents fell into the "Don't know" category, which could signify uncertainty, a lack of sufficient information about the new system, or a desire for more details before forming a definitive opinion. Overall, while there's clear majority support, construction companies in South Suda, introducing a new system should focus on addressing the concerns of the "reject" group and providing comprehensive information to the "don't know" segment to ensure broader buy-in and a smoother transition.

Traditional Pay System Limitations

The study findings on the limitations of traditional pay systems, derived from workshop deliberations as indicated in Table 9, reveal that Qualifications and Overtime are perceived as equally significant issues, both cited by 29% of respondents. This indicates a strong concern in South Sudan construction industry, that current pay structures may not adequately recognize employees' qualifications or fairly compensate for overtime work. Performance-based pay is also seen as a notable limitation by 19% of respondents, suggesting challenges in how performance is measured and linked to rewards. While less frequently

Table 9: Limitations of Traditional Pay Systems

Limitation Category	Percentage (%)
Qualification	29
Overtime	29
Performance-Based	19
Salary with all Components	14
No response	9

cited, Salary with all components (14 %) still presents an area of concern, implying that even comprehensive traditional packages have perceived shortcomings. A small portion of respondents (9 %) provided no specific limitation. Overall, these findings highlight a multi-faceted dissatisfaction with traditional pay systems, particularly emphasizing issues related to valuing qualifications and managing overtime compensation effectively.

Readiness for New Pay Model

The study findings on employee readiness for a new pay model, as shown in Table 10, indicate that Perceived Organization Support is the most significant factor,

Table 10: Readiness for New Pay Model

Factor influencing Readiness	Percentage (%)
Perceived Organizational Support	40
Organizational Justice	30
Expectancy, Instrumentality, Valence	15
Participation in Decision-Making	10
Readiness for Change	5

accounting for 40% of the responses. This strongly suggests that employees in construction companies in South Sudan, are more willing to embrace a new pay structure when they feel their organization values and backs them. Following this, Expectancy, Instrumentality, and Valence (30%) are crucial, highlighting that employees need to clearly understand how their effort will lead to desired rewards and how important those rewards are to them. Organizational Justice contributes 15%, emphasizing the importance of fairness in the processes and outcomes related to the new pay model. Participation in Decision-Making (10%) also plays a role, suggesting that involving employees in the design or implementation process can enhance their readiness. Finally, general Readiness for Change had the least impact at 5%, indicating that for this specific change, broader organizational support and clear motivational links are more critical than a general openness to change. These results collectively underscore that a supportive and transparent approach is key to successfully introducing a new pay model.

Strategies for Acceptance

Table 11: Strategies for acceptance

Strategy	Percentage (%)
Pay Satisfaction and Approval	45
Fairness and Justice	30
Trust, Risk, Credibility	20
Technology/System Acceptance	5

CONCLUSION

This study, employing a mixed-methods approach in South Sudan’s construction sector, conclusively highlights the critical need for a shift from traditional to modern

pay systems. A significant majority of employees (87% in questionnaires, 65% in interviews and workshops) expressed readiness and acceptance for new pay models, primarily driven by a strong desire for Perceived Organizational Support (40% to 43%), Fairness and Justice (22% to 40%), and Pay Satisfaction and Appraisal (30% to 45%). Traditional pay systems are widely perceived as limited, especially regarding Pay based on Qualifications (29% to 33%) and Overtime compensation (29% to 32%). While the need for change is evident, the findings underscore that successful transitions depend less on technological acceptance (5% to 10%) and more on addressing human-centric concerns such as transparent communication, employee involvement, and building trust in a challenging operational environment characterized by insecurity and underdevelopment.

Recommendations

For Construction Companies in South Sudan:

- **Prioritize Perceived Organizational Support and Justice:** Focus on creating an environment where employees feel valued, heard, and treated fairly. Implement clear, transparent policies for compensation and performance management to build trust.
- **Enhance Pay Satisfaction and Appraisal Systems:** Review and revise current pay structures to ensure they adequately compensate for qualifications, performance, and overtime. Implement robust and transparent performance appraisal systems that directly link to rewards.
- **Foster Employee Involvement:** Actively involve employees in the design and implementation phases of any new pay model. Utilize participatory approaches, as suggested by UNDP and ILO, to ensure their input is valued, addressing fears and skepticism about reforms.
- **Improve Communication and Financial Literacy:** Bridge the knowledge gap concerning pay components. Conduct workshops and provide clear, consistent communication on how compensation is structured, the benefits of new systems, and how changes will affect employees, especially given limited exposure to modern compensation systems.
- **Address Traditional Pay Limitations Systematically:** Develop strategies to overcome specific weaknesses of traditional systems identified, such as inadequate recognition of qualifications and unclear overtime compensation.
- **Build Trust and Credibility:** In a fragile context like South Sudan, consistent and ethical leadership is paramount. Demonstrate commitment to reforms through actions, ensuring that perceived risks are managed and information shared is credible.

Areas for Further Research

- **Impact of Specific Modern Pay Models:** Future research could delve into the effectiveness of different types of modern pay systems (e.g, skill-based pay, competency-based pay) within the unique context of South Sudan’s construction sector, beyond just

performance-based pay.

- Longitudinal Study on Pay System Transition: A longitudinal study could track the long-term impacts of new pay system implementations on employee satisfaction, productivity, and retention, offering insights into sustainment challenges.

- Role of Informal Employment in Pay System Reforms: Given the prevalence of informal labor practices, research could explore how to effectively integrate or transition informal workers into formal, modernized pay structures.

- Gender-Specific Perceptions of Pay Systems: Investigating how limitations of traditional pay and readiness for new models differ across gender lines could reveal unique challenges and opportunities for equitable pay reform.

- Influence of External Stakeholders: Further research could explore the role of government policies, labor unions, and international organizations in shaping the adoption and success of modern pay systems in conflict-affected regions.

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